WHO ARE THE SHAPERS OF NEW CULTURAL TONGUES?

By HEINZ KLOSS

In the "Pennsylvania Dutchman" for Dec. 1, 1950, Prof. J. William Frey had criticized the notion that Pennsylvania German might ever be elevated to the dignity of a literary language. This brought forth an answer of mine in the "Eck" for Nov. 10, 1951, which in turn has been answered by Frey in the Dec. 1, 1951, "Dutchman."

Frey puts forward two weighty arguments against the concept of having Dutch made over into a literary tongue. First of all Frey asserts that "Dutch is a folkspeech and will remain a folkspeech as long as the Dutch FOLK want it that way, no matter what a few scholars have hoped for it to be." Besides, he asserts that in every instance where other folk tongues developed into a literary standard the conditions surrounding these languages were different from the southeastern Pennsylvania milieu, and that in particular the Dutch have NEVER NEVER (the capital letters are Frey's) been a united front—as e.g. the French of Quebec who are 100 per cent Roman Catholic.

Let me first dispose of the latter argument. There are several grains of truth in it. It is true that in many other cases the revival of half-obsolete tongues was a corollary to politico - nationalistic movements for which there is no need in Pennsylvania. It is equally true that to be split religiously constitutes a considerable hinderance to linguistic unfoldment. Yet there are instances of cults (to use the sociologist's term) where conditions were strikingly similar to those obtaining among the Pennsylvania Germans. Take the West-Frisians. They are a comparatively small group of some 300,000 people in the northern Netherlands who are divided into a number of religious factions. We find liberal Protestants, conservative Reformed people, we find Mennonites (Menno Simon by the way was a Frisian), and we have a sizable number of Catholics—and you will have to admit that at least the borderline separating Protestants from Catholics does all but not exist in the Dutchland. Moreover there never was at stake among the Frisians a concept of nationalism, of political freedom and the like—never, that is until very recently, 100 years after the linguistic revival has taken place. It happened to originate among one specific sub-group, among the liberals, but gradually it spread among orthodox Protestants as well as among Roman Catholics, who today have cultural associations of their own but are working together freely with the other wings of the Frisian movement in a common desire to save and to promote the ancestral tongue.

Another example would be the Rheto-Romanic people in Switzerland. They number a mere 40,000 —less that a fifth of the Pennsylvania Dutchmen. They never were oppressed either politically or economically. They are partly Protestants, partly Catholics. And they are hampered by two handicaps unknown among the Dutchmen: their exceedingly small number and the many variations among their dialects which have compelled them actually to develop not one but four literary languages —and that for a handful of 40,000 people! So you see: cultural tongues may unfold and flourish under conditions even less favorable than those obtaining in Pennsylvania. We must of course not overlook the fact that in Switzerland the government (federal as well as state) subsidizes Rheto-Romanic publications. I do not know whether a similar gesture might be expected from the Harrisburg authorities.

But now for Frey's second argument. Only the FOLK can change the status of Pennsylvaanisch? But who is responsible for the present indifferent attitude of "the folk" towards attempts to raise the literary level? Dr. Frey himself gives the answer when in his article he speaks of "the thousands of formal attempts, emanating from school teachers, preachers, college professors and many of the other semi-literate during the 19th century to completely obliterate . . . Pennsylvania Dutch . . . And this unfortunately DID (the capital letters are Frey's) trickle down into the maases." So who wrought the present folk attitude toward Pennsylvania German? The intellectuals and the semi-intellectuals. And how can the masses get rid of this attitude? Through the help of other intellectuals.

In the very same issue of the Dutchman, Dr. Yoder tells us about a true folk-poet, a plain workman at that, about Harry Hower, who longed to bring about a come-back of his beloved mother-tongue, who even dreamed of seeing recognized "the Pennsylvania German language" as the "golden mean between the heavy but picturesque German and the liquid but light English." A naive folk-dream if there ever was one —but what did Hower achieve? Almost nothing, because workmen and farmers, i.e. the FOLK in the narrow sense of the word as a rule have neither time nor tools to effect a language revival. It simply takes two groups of people—or I would rather say: of folk—plain men and women with a sincere longing to see their mother tongue preserved and honored and elevated—and intellectuals who are of the folk too and who sense the inarticulate longing of the masses and know how to voice it and how to satisfy it.

Sure enough these intellectuals in the beginning will meet with as much animosity as applause. The founder of the Afrikaans movement in South Africa, the Rev. Du Toit, who wrote his first attempts in the mother-tongue under a pen-name, heard a farmer say he would shoot the man who wrote Afrikaans if he only knew his name. Rev. Hammershaimb, when first using Faroese instead of Danish in a religious service, met with indignation. But while Frey asserts the Dutch people would be either enraged or amused at attempts to use Pennsylvania German for religious services he should realize that they are becoming almost a custom under his very eyes—witness the Hufnagel letter on Pennsylvania German "Breddiche" in Barba's ECK for Dec. 22, 1951.

Frey, finally, makes a number of remarks which are interesting in themselves but without relevance to the issue at stake. He says Pennsylvania German cannot be purified from its English elements—but that's something I never thought of. I even hold that it would mean a loss in richness and flavor. Pennsylvania German un-Englished no longer would be Pennsylvania German. Frey calls the cultural language concept a pet notion of mine but what matters is not whether a certain alien would like to see Pennsylvania German thus raised, but whether this is a workable concept to be embraced by native Pennsylvanians. He discusses the advisability of pinning the label "Pennsylvania German" on that specific brand of High German which my friend Ralph Wood has baptized "Pennsylvania High German." However that is a problem of terminology, a mere formality without significance .

I want to congratulate Dr. Frey on the wonderful spirit with which he accepted my earlier attack. Let me disclose right here that the editors of the "Dutchman" for years have been sending me their paper free of charge, and that it would have been quite understandable had Dr. Frey treated me like an ingrate. It is my sincere hope that he will with equal generosity and indulgence forgive me for this second rejoinder which after all is motivated by what we two will, I am sure, always have in common: a deep-seated love for the beautiful Pennsylvania German tongue. And in at least one respect I think of him more highly than he does himself: I believe that Professor Frey too belongs to the Pennsylvania Dutch folk and that no linguistic rebirth is conceivable unless it is staged and shared by folk-men of his schooling and scholarship. Bill Frey, the popular singer of Pennsylvania German songs is the living example that scholarship need not unfolk a man.

(Dr. Kloss, greatest German authority on the Pennsylvania Germans, has been a frequent contributor to the ECK. — P.A.B.)

SEELE AS MER NET ESSE KANN

Der Parre Mohler meent, ich hett ihn "misrepresent" in eens vun meine letschte Brief, wie ich gsaat hab, ass er daet Gott danke, ass sei Gemee ihm sei Loh regler alle Vaddel Yaahr bezaahle daet. Er saagt mer, es waer gans wennich Geld, as er sehne daet es Yaahr rum, un vum Geld fer des Yaahrs Loh hett er noch gaar nix gsehne. Ich hab ihn gfrogt wie er dann lewe daet, dann hot er gsaat uff was anner Leit net esse welle un die paar Grumbiere un Riewe as er in seim Gaarde gereest hot darrich der Summer. Nau, es hot mich arrig gschpeit des zu heere. Ich daet meene en Mann kennt gut breddiche mit seim Maage voll Riewe. Awwer des iss oft der Fall. Die Leit meene en Parre sett lewe wie en Engel. Sie driete ihn so. Wann er um der Weg iss, dann sin sie so glatt ass en gebiggelti Wans un alles as er saagt iss recht. Sie duhne alles fer ihn, ass wie ihn bezaahle un sell iss es Haahlding. Sie misse uff barricks kaafe odder verhungere, un wann emool en Parre me Mann e paar Daaler schuldich iss un er denkt, er watt net bezaahlt, dann is em Parre sei influence iwwer seller Mann fatt. Der Parre daet's gaern bezaahle, wann er es Wexel hett, awwer sei Gemee bezaahlt ihn net un wie will er sei Schulde bezaahle?

Ich hab emool en Parre gekennt, as schier alle Sunndaag zu seinere Gemee gschwetzt hot wege seim Loh. Endlich iss en alder Vorschteher, wu als en Vaddel Daaler es Yaahr gewwe hot zu em Parre, uffgschtanne un hot gsaat er hett gmeent, sie hette ihn gedingt fer breddiche fer ihre Seele un net alsfatt fer ihre Geld. Der alt Parre hot ihn ewennich aagegeuckt darrich sei Brille un hot dernoh gsaat:

"Mei liewer Bruder, ich bin do fer breddiche fer eier Seele, awwer Seele kann ich net esse, un wann ich kennt, dann daet's zehe Dausend nemme wie deini fer me hungeriche Mann en reschpectable Breckfescht mache!"

So hot's zu viel Karrichegeher alleweil. Sie driete en Parre wie en Keenich, bis sie ausfinne, ass er yuscht en commoner Mensch iss un dernoh driete sie ihn wie en Sau. Die Sache sin all letz. Der lieb Gott frogt niemand fer uff Riewe lewe, so ass er seelich schtarrewe kann, un wann ich en Parre waer un sie daete mich net besser bezaahle, dann daet ich mei Abschiedsbreddich mache wie der alt Parre wie er gsaat hot:

"Geld regiert die Welt un Dummheit 's Glabberdaal! — un abaddich die G —, un denne laaft's zu de Ohre raus!" —

BOONASTIEL
(Thomas Hess Harter, 1854-1933)

PAELZER LEIT

Our Pennsylvania German is a persistent and tenacious dialect, indicative of the character of our people. Two hundred years and more have passed since our forefathers left their native land, and yet our distant cousins in the Palatinate, descendants of those who remained behind, continue to this day to speak a dialect not unlike our own. Most of our readers will have little difficulty in reading the following verses culled from August Heinrich's PFAELZER MUNDART-DICHTUNGEN, published in Speyer in the Palatinate, 1928. —ED.

Lache, lache, ess isch gsund,
Lache macht die Backe rund,
Lache macht das Herze weit,
Lache recht in Froehlichkeit.

Lach e bissel jeden Dag,
Lach dir Traene aus 'm Aag.
Lach dich bucklig, lach dich krumm,
Lache bringt dei Sorge um.

Lach dich krank un lach dich tot,
Lache macht die Backe rot.
Lache gibt dir widder Mut,
Lache, lache, dess isch gut.

Mer Paelzer Leit sin oft voll Witz,
Voll Luscht un voll Humor,
Doch gukkt bei alle "Knepp un Schnitz"
De Ernscht aach widder vor.

Wohin uns aach des Schicksal stellt
Un wie uns 's Lewe zieht,
Mer kinn aach fiehle mit de Welt,
Henn Herz un henn Gemuet.

Doch immer kannscht nit witzig sei,
Nit immer kann mer lache;
De Herrgott duht aach Sunneschei
Un triewe Dage mache.

HARRICH GUT!

Wann ebber ebbes saagt zu eem, sett mer gut harriche, so dass mer gewiss weess, was er gsaat hot. Zu oft harricht mer en Mann net recht aa, noh kummt mer in Umgelegenheit. Ich hab schunn gheert vun viel Gschpichte, wu en Mann letz verschtanne iss warre. Er hot ee Ding gsaat, un die Leit hen ebbes schunscht rausgenumme.

Abaddich sett mer gut un scharref harriche, wann mer ebbes kaaft vun ebber. Weesscht, der Mann wu kaaft, muss sei Aagge un Ohre uff halte. Ich hab yuscht katzlich widder do draa gedenkt.

Ich hab en accident ghatt mit meim auto un hab paar Daag am garage rumghunke. Eener vun de Kaeris datt hot gsehne, ass ich wennich uffgemuntert sei sett. Er hot gsaat, "Kaschbar, kumm mol do riwwer, noh verzehl ich dir en gschpassichi Gschicht." Des iss, was er mir verzehlt hot.

En Mann hot en wunnerbaarer scheener Gaul ghatt. Der waar so glatt, as wie en Ool. Er hot graad uff de Bee gschtanne, un der Schwans graad hinne naus gschtreckt. Er waar en rechts Pikter vumme Gaul. Dem Mann sei Nochber hot Wohlgfalle an dem Gaul ghatt.

Mol ee Daag hot er ausgfunne, mer kennt den Gaul kaafe. Er iss zu dem Gaul seim Eeggner un hott gsaat, "Was witt du fer den Gaul?" — "Ei," saagt sei Eeggner, "Fufzich Daaler." Dann saagt der, wu kaafe hot welle, "Ferwas witt du den Gaul verkaafe fer fufzich Daaler?" — "Ei," saagt sei Eeggner, "Er guckt net gut." Well, endlich hot der Mann der Gaul verkaaft. In zwee Woche iss der Mann, wu der Gaul gkaaft hot, zerickkumme. Er waar so bees as en Sau. Was hot er gscholte! "Du Raawer," hot er gsaat, "Du hoscht mich awwer bschisse. Der Gaul iss yo blind." — "Nee," saagt der wu der Gaul verkaaft hot, "Ich hab dich net bschisse. Ich hab dir riwwer un niwwer gsaat, der Gaul guckt net gut, awwer du hoscht mich yo gaar net aagharricht." Weessch, en blinder Gaul kann gaar net gucke.

—DER KASCHBAR HUFNAGEL

EN PICKNICK

Wu waar ich? Kannscht net denke!
Ei, ich waar krank im Bett.
Sell waare scheene Zeide—
Ich hab's entschoit, you bet!

'S hot niemand mich gebaddert
Un gwunnert was ich duh;
Un niemand, "Meint die Diere!"
Un niemand, "Butz dei Schuh!"

Mei Tietscher, sie iss kumme,
Hot Orantsches gebrocht;
Die Memm hot gude Sache
Fer mich allee gekocht.

Ich hab mei Taeblets gnumme
Mit Tschelli aus re Bool,
Un der Daadi hot mer gewwe
E Nickel allemol.

Die Gremmemm iss kumme
Mit Pickters mich zu seh;
Un die Endi hot Kendi
Gemacht fer mich allee.

Ich hab daufe schpiele
Mit meim Grischtdaag Sach;
Un niemand hot gewatscht,
Dass ich nix letz draa mach.

Der Hund hot daufe kumme
Graad in die Schtubb mit mir;
Die gans Nacht hot er glegge
Yuscht inseit vun der Dier.

Mei scheeni grossi Schweschter
Hot Schtoris mir verzehlt;
Ich hab net brauche kenne,
Hab e gans Woch Schul verfehlt.

Un nau dass ich bin besser,
Scheint alles froh zu sei;
Ich wott's deet lenger laeste
Ich hab's entschoit. — O mei!

—LOUISE A. WEITZEL
(1862-1934)